

# The Creation of Alaska's Smart Set

By THOMAS B. DRAYTON

Seward, Alaska, Oct.—(By Mail).  
IN THE words of Colonel Andy Simpson, than whom no Alaskan is a more accurate observer, "until the women folks begins to drop in and boost our population some strong, both numerical and by way of natural increase, we ain't got none of these here castes up in Alaska; no social distinctions of no kind whatever; everybody bein' jest the same, 'ceptin' Siwash, of course, which ain't reg'lar folks."

Col. Simpson being a stickler for exactitude, it would be an affront to him and a needless imposition upon the patience of the reader to offer proof in the form of illustration or otherwise of the literal truth of his assertion.

It is true that of the few women we had in the earlier days some were preferred to others because of their comparative youth and attractiveness, but of social supremacy over others there was none. Men were then, as now, distinguished from each other almost solely by character, intelligence and natural leadership; precisely as they are everywhere under a like environment.

A reference to an Alaska man as of social prominence would be deemed by him at best as a joke of questionable taste; at worst as an impugment of his dignity apt to subject him to harmful ridicule. Alaska society, therefore, is exclusively a feminine institution in which men figure but as counters in a game.

After the Klondike rush and the various Alaskan stampedes immediately succeeding, a good many permanent residents came in, forming small settlements chiefly along the coast. These men brought their wives and children. Soon after, school teachers and other unattached women of respectability followed. Even with this limited nucleus, society began to take form, and from the first was characterized by distinctions which have finally grown to be as pronounced as those obtaining in cities of the United States.

The women newly arrived, particularly mothers of families, refused to recognize the women identified with the gambling and dance halls and, with feminine singularity, placed the ban most decisively upon those whom fame and fortune had most favored in those profitable activities.

Such was our first segregation of social elements.

With a rapid if almost imperceptible development, other social distinctions quickly appeared. The women who washed clothes for a living, or served as cooks, or waitresses in hotels and roadhouses soon observed a growing coldness toward them from the wives and daughters of men grown prosperous, and, although they were not entirely barred from the social upper stratum for a year or so, it was soon apparent even to the dull perceptions of men that at dances and other gatherings those ladies deemed themselves proportionately of a finer social texture whose husbands and fathers had been most successful in business, particularly if their own personal antecedents would bear a reasonably exacting scrutiny.

Increasing prosperity enabled many to abandon the log houses of earlier years for more pretentious frame structures, and thus came the definite final parting of the ways. No more log-rollings, no more house-raising, no more indiscriminate intermingling were to pain, annoy and perhaps depreciate those who by inherent

social merit were now ensconced as becomes personages of a rank entitled to look down upon the common herd.

The world of Alaskan fashion and exclusiveness was now born and would in time be on parade, but with all its advantages the newly-created situation was difficult, and evidences of impending rupture among the elect few most conscious of their superior worth were early seen; and even before the coming of a second snow, our first exclusive social set began to separate into various groups. These several offshoots each claimed a superexcellence of social merit, obvious and palpable to its adherents even if inscrutable and beyond the coarser fiber of the masculine mind. But as individual entities their careers were brief. A new alignment was developing; elements of still further disintegration were at work; the process of elimination was on.

The squaw-man was perhaps the first to receive his congé, he having been endured with ill-concealed impatience from the beginning. He was soon followed by the faro dealer, the roulette artist, and the woman whose marriage to some man of business capacity could not efface a record more consistent with romance than social preeminence.

From the social maelstrom produced by these continuous eliminations, upheavals and disintegrations, there finally emerged a coterie of respectable persons whose prosperity exempted them from the wash-tub and the ironing-board and enabled them to parade the handsomest garments pictured in the voluminous catalogues of the mail-order houses of American cities; and thus was created Alaska's smart set as it exists today.

Its advantages to even the general public have in fact been many, while its hurtfulness consists of the pique of those excluded, and the heart-burnings of its members, whose incessant struggles to excel each other in social importance necessarily leaves the bitterness of defeat in the heart of the vanquished sister.

To the credit of our fashionable society surely all but the ignorant or prejudiced would concede the introduction of the white collar, the tooth brush, the manicure set, and innumerable other concrete evidences of a social smartness which has not only advanced but arrived.

Our fashionable society, like its prototype in all other homes of simple democracy, is based primarily upon material resources, without which its objects and purposes could not be achieved, and without which reasonable persons could scarce expect to be admitted to its ranks.

That within itself it has many sub-distinctions, near-distinctions and distinct-distinctions is a lamentable and unavoidable evil due to a variety of immediately-contributing causes but each, in the final analysis, a corollary of one fundamental factor of distressing magnitude.

That elemental factor is the insecurity of fortune in Alaska.

Virtually all of our worth-while people are interested in mining, and of this general class a vast ma-

jority are themselves practical miners of the exuberantly hopeful, chance-taking type; and in consequence are rich today and poor tomorrow, or the other way about.

On every hand may be seen workmen with pick and pan who but yesterday, as it were, paid wages to their present employers; and while not a man among them will hesitate to risk his all on an alluring mining prospect, not one would accept a wager at even money that the relation of employer and workman will not be reversed tomorrow.

Manifestly no fashionable social craft such as ours could face the continuous storms of varying fortune thus encountered and sail unscathed and undisturbed. To again employ the coldly-analytic terms of Col. Simpson, "it sho'ly scrambles the social fabric frightful."

Now and then a business man takes a flyer at the mining game, strikes it rich, and retires to guard his competency with the jealous care of a tradesman or banker; whereupon the social status of his family becomes, as the saying is, immutable; but no nature-made miner ever yet let well enough alone. Tomorrow sees his fortune doubled or sees him broke, and also witnesses with amazing promptitude the upward or downward slide of his feminine household on the social register.

As almost every miner whose operations cover any considerable period of time has experienced some or many of these wide-swinging vicissitudes of fortune, so almost every miner's wife has numerous accounts to settle. Indeed, it is to be feared that too often a member of our exclusive set seizes upon the moments of her husband's recovery and her own contemporaneous social ascendancy to liquidate with interest debts of resentment never forgotten and frequently magnified by time; overlooking, with the charming inconsistency of her sex, that the snub under which she still smarts was received during a plebian period, and was less the fault of the individual who administered it than the fashionable social system of which she herself is a worthy or at least oft-recurring ornament.

All members of Alaskan fashionable society are charming; all interesting; all original, some especially so in the matter of dress. Many of them enjoy or at least endure exceptional opportunities for culture.

High society leaders even in the States could surely boast no wider range of reading on all subjects relating to fashionable places and events; and certainly our Alaskan smart set need bow to none in practiced efficiency in the use of broad-sounding A's; the pretty mannerisms of elegant drawing rooms as outlined in the best printed guides; or the intricacies of such Terpsichorean accomplishments as the hesitation, the fox-trot and the bunny-hug.

If there be yet other treasures, other merits, other virtues in the fashionable life of any land which we ourselves do not now possess, let no doubt arise that we will acquire them all in time and to excess; a prediction based on a long-continued and long intimate knowledge of the will, the determination and the ingenuity of the Alaskan woman of social ambitions, a type whose equal in those respects has not been seen since the scrolls of eternity were rolled back and the order given that time begin.

## Using Natural Steam in Tuscany

AT LARDERELLO, in Tuscany, an interesting experiment has been made with extremely satisfactory results. At this point there is an area of about 36 square miles where, from time immemorial, natural steam springs have existed. As early as 1790 the presence of boric acid in the water condensed from the steam was detected, and for many years the Societa Boracifera di Larderello, which is a combination of the small companies formerly in operation, has been producing boric acid on a large scale. This company controls the entire district. The natural steam was first used for evaporating the water from which the boric acid is obtained. Wells are drilled and dry steam at a pressure of three atmospheres is found at depths varying from 195 to 390 feet. At Larderello some of these wells have had an initial production of 154,000 pounds of steam an hour. In 1897 the natural steam was first used for heating the boilers of the company, and in 1905 a further step was taken when experiments were conducted with the steam in a piston

engine. The results were so satisfactory that a large engine was installed which is still in operation.

Having a very large surplus of steam in excess of that required for its own uses, the Societa Boracifera di Larderello decided to utilize this excess steam for producing electric power. In 1912 a 250 kilowatt turbo-generator was installed—the natural steam being employed not directly in the turbine, but as a means of heating water for the production of the steam required; and in 1916 a large power plant was completed. Power lines have been built, and these stretch as far as Florence, and to important steel, iron and copper works and mines in other outlying districts, all of the power being produced through the employment of the natural steam. As far as the district of Larderello is concerned, the use of natural steam has solved the coal problem, which is such a serious one for other sections of Italy that have not been equally favored by nature. Coal today is selling in Italy for more than \$40 a ton and it is impossible to obtain sufficient for the needs of the people.

## Giving Nature a Rest

LOOK at the bottle of vanilla extract in your kitchen. Although it is vanilla in the pudding and vanilla in the ice cream, the chances are that the bottle says: "Pure vanillin flavor." This does not mean that the contents is a substitute, but that by a chemical process the real article has been artificially duplicated.

There are quite a number of substances made in this way. A chemist discovered what the actual flavoring quality of the vanilla bean is composed of. Then he devised a means of producing it in the laboratory. Then he found out how to make it on a large scale and cheaply in a factory.

In this manner, the commerce in vanilla beans has begun to die out, and today comparatively little of our vanilla flavoring ever saw a bean. The new article is the same compound that nature made, only science has taken the job away from her as far as supplying the commercial world is concerned. It's merely giving nature a chance to take a vacation, as far as that particular product is involved. Chemists have achieved similar duplications of the natural product in the case of oil of wintergreen, indigo, and oil of bitter almonds.

## Plants Enjoy Free Will

THE generally accepted belief is that man and the rest of the animal world have freedom of choice, and of voluntary motion, while the vegetable kingdom grows only mechanically by natural law. However, observations made under the microscope seem to indicate that plants enjoy freedom as well.

One plant known as *Volvox globator*, which is so minute that millions of them could be placed in a wineglass, is seen to whirl like a top when viewed under the microscope. Some plants found in ponds, also very minute, have the faculty of motion.

Scientists who have given a close study to the habits of climbing plants state that they do not merely climb upward by natural law, but that they appear to exercise a certain amount of freedom of choice. For example, their tendrils, in climbing over a piece of wood which has holes bored in it, are seen to try one hole and then another, until they find one that pleases them. One investigator reports seeing a tendril withdraw itself after having occupied a hole for thirty-six hours.

## When Coffee Was Young

WHEN you drink your morning cup of coffee, flavored to suit your particular taste with sugar and cream, you perhaps do not realize by what a narrow margin you are indulging that palate of yours.

For coffee, in its early days, had as severe a struggle to establish itself in public favor as any beverage could have.

Coffee drinking is of Turkish origin, as far as its introduction into Europe is concerned, although the bean is believed to have come originally from Abyssinia. It was first used by dervishes to enable these holy men to keep awake during their devotional exercises. Hence, those who maintain that coffee keeps them awake are following a well established tradition.

The example of the holy men popularized the beverage, and its use spread to Cairo, where a group of the theologians condemned it, not because they were afraid it would not keep the dervishes properly awake, but because they deemed it an intoxicating drink, and contrary to the laws of Mohammed.

But the sultan of that day (about 1511 A. D.) liked coffee, so there was another convocation of theologians, properly instructed how to vote on the coffee issue. They gave coffee a clean bill of health, and it began to flourish again. In fact, Moslem coffeehouses became so popular that they drew folks away from the mosques.

The first coffeehouse in England was opened about 1650. However, the hardships of the beverage were not over, for Charles II. suppressed all coffeehouses in England in 1675, and some of the proprietors were temporarily imprisoned. Shortly afterward, it was re-established in favor and its use has been growing more widespread ever since.

## Woods That Won't Float

THERE are a number of woods of the United States which are heavier than water. There are also a number of species, such as oaks and hickories, in which occasional specimens will prove to be heavier than water. Of those which are at all times heavier than water, the most familiar are white wood, *Lignum Vitae*, Torch wood, Red Iron wood, Black Iron wood, Log-wood, Iron wood, Montana mahogany, Mangrove, Seven-year Apple, Wild Dilly, Black Mangrove, Crab wood, White oak and Live oak.